Is It Time to Ditch Diversity and Inclusion?

Here’s what may come next.

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Diversity and inclusion have been a hot topic for years. Not surprising, in the light of the diversity and gender discrimination scandals surrounding big names like Uber, Walmart, Microsoft and many more.

Despite all the efforts and changes in the applicable legislation in many countries, there are still underrepresented groups of people who face inequality or discrimination one way or another. Being it not equal access to jobs, lower pay rates, unconscious bias in the recruitment process, limited opportunities for career development and more, it seems that the diversity and inclusion concept needs to be overhauled.

In 2018, Atlassian conducted a State of Diversity Survey which highlighted some shocking results. Although 80 percent of the respondents agreed that D&I is important, there was a decrease of up to 50 percent in individual participation in diversity and inclusion initiatives and less than 30 percent of the underrepresented groups actually had representation, retention and sense of belonging.

When I read the Atlassian State of Diversity Survey for the first time, I was curious to find out if there was something that could deliver better results than the D&I concept. What could be it?

To find the answer, I wanted to speak with D&I experts who were on ground, executing D&I campaigns and speaking daily with underserved talent. It took some time to organize interviews with 20+ world D&I experts but it was worth the effort.

So, the D&I concept is not what it was meant to be. Here's what may come next as many innovative companies have already overhauled their policies and practices.

Instead, a focus on balanced teams and the sense of belonging.

If there is something that most people agree on, it is that bringing on board diverse hires is just the first step. Even more, it can turn out to be a negative experience for those employees who then feel excluded. By the way, this is one of the main reasons for the low retention rate.

Asked what diversity hiring means to her, Amelia Ransom, Sr. Director of Engagement & Diversity, Avalara, responded:

> *"I hate this term! I know what it's supposed to mean—merit-based hiring that's free of bias, but it rarely means that when used. People use this term to explain why they hired someone "different". As in, "Suzie is a 'diversity hire'. It becomes a shorthand for why we let someone into our club and sets up how that person is typically going to be treated within an organization—as a charity case or as less than qualified.'' Source: Transformify HR Blog*

Balanced teams, on the other hand, are something most team members are happy to associate with. Don't be misled by the word ''balanced'' as it doesn't imply ratios. In fact, balanced teams are about different perspectives, life experiences and world views that come with people having diverse backgrounds.

When it comes to inclusion, Aubrey Blanche, Global Head of Diversity & Belonging at Atlassian said:

> *'' Just like diversity, ''inclusion'' is language we shall stop using. The reason is that inclusion is not good enough. It's is just like someone is calling you saying '' Hey, I am having a party and the people I wanted to come over are not joining, so you can come now.'' I am not interested in being included in spaces designed for specific groups of people who have no interest in what I can bring to the table. What I want is to show up in a space where I belong, a space that has been designed for me in the first place.'' Source:* ***Transformify HR Blog***

The good news is that many companies already recognise the need to make all new hires feel at home. Cision is one of these companies and their Vice President of Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Valerie Lopez, was clear:

> *'' We can hire as much and many diverse talents as possible but once they come in and feel not valued as a part of the team, they will just leave. So, ensuring that company's policies are aligned with the diversity hiring objectives is as key as team trainings and activities.'' Source:* ***Transformify HR Blog***

Appreciating cultural diversity.

I've experienced cultural diversity first hand as Transformify's team is a 100 percent remote and scattered around the world. There are almost as many cultures and nationalities as team members. Appreciating each other's traditions and world views and aligning them with Transformify's company values is our secret to success. How otherwise would we be able to expand globally?

Often, post mergers and acquisitions, there is a clash of

corporate cultures driven by the way of doing business, geography and nationality. Building strong teams under such circumstances is anything but easy.

There is a lot one could learn from Exela as the company acquired many smaller companies in Europe and Asia over the years. Carlos Mallen, Senior Vice President, Human Resources for the Americas and Europe, said:

> *'' Working with the management and the leadership team post-merger to understand what their needs are and how to help them to be successful adds value to the organisation as a whole. At Exela, we have been lucky as mergers and acquisitions added diversity at certain levels where it was much needed. Working with the individuals and helping them to be successful is the best practice that always works for us. This shall happen both ways – top-down and bottom-up. ''*
> *Source: Transformify HR Blog*

However, building strong diverse teams post mergers and acquisitions is never a piece of cake. Usually, the CEO or the founder of the acquired company stays on board for a period of time and it is hard for him or her to adjust to the new role and the responsibilities that come with it. Part of the management team may be made redundant to achieve economies of scale and the rest of the team feels insecure which brings us back to the concept of balanced teams no matter the circumstances.

It is still too early to say if most companies will get rid of the diversity and inclusion concept. One is clear, though – the D&I concept needs to be overhauled to achieve the results that the society has been after for a long time.

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